

# How it Feels to Die in the Electric Chair

**Scientists Have Just Discovered Many Secrets Which Have Long Puzzled Them in Regard to Death by Electric Shock From the Experience of a Man Who Was Electrocuted and Brought Back to Life**

WHEN the electric chair was substituted for the old fashioned gallows in New York it was because it was believed that electrocution was painless. But just what were the sensations of death in the electric chair scientists were unable to say, because no electrocuted victim came back to life to tell them.

It was assumed that the shock of the powerful current would instantly render the condemned man unconscious. But the unpleasant feature of most electrocutions has been the necessity of repeating the shock several times. This was not foreseen.

Experience in the death chamber has shown that the electric current does not usually destroy life at the first shock. Evidences of pulsating life compel the executioner to turn on the current again and yet again. This distressing failure of the electric chair to instantly end life has caused much speculation among scientists and humanitarians.

Does the first shock end the consciousness of the condemned man?

Or is the victim still conscious—hovering between death and life, does the man in the chair realize what is going on?

What, if any, was the agony of the first shock?

What were the agonies of the victim during the moments elapsing between the first shock and the second impact of the current? Was he entirely unconscious, partly conscious or fully conscious of the horrors of the situation which the law never meant to be inflicted on him?

And if the first shock of the current benumbed the condemned man's brain, did returning consciousness bring with it tortures of bodily misery which have never been known or suspected?

## The Victim

### Falls Apparently Dead.

Nobody has been able to answer these questions until an accident happened which unexpectedly illuminated this whole subject of what the victim in the electric chair really sees, hears, feels and suffers.

It was the morning of February 3 that Harry Tonious pushed his hand truck of steel castings into the freight elevator of the National Screw and Tack Company, in Cleveland. His left foot stepped firmly on a "live" wire, which had accidentally become detached from the electric controller of the elevator. Tonious' face paled. He dropped the truck, uttered a heartrending cry, and fell lifeless to the floor.

The ambulance surgeon, who soon arrived with two police attendants, declared that Tonious was dead and that it was a coroner's case. But hoping that something might be done to resuscitate the man, the surgeon ordered the body to be brought to the hospital for experiments with the pulmotor.

After vigorous work the left leg of Tonious was seen to tremble slightly. One of the physicians flung over and put his ear to the man's breast. There was a slight flutter heard.

The pulmotor was applied more vigorously than ever. Other measures for resuscitation were taken and before long the "dead" man's body stirred and his lips moved. The next moment his eyelids fluttered and he shook his shoulders, as if throwing off a heavy load. Subconsciously his left hand moved in the direction of the left foot—the member which had come in contact with the wire.

One of the doctors opened one of the man's eyes and saw the eyeball roll to one side and then back again. Life was beginning to assert itself, and a moment later Tonious tried to rise, but was held fast by the attendants, delighted that the object of their attention had been brought back to life.

Life returned by leaps and bounds and the "dead" man was soon able to open his eyes and talk. Two days later Tonious was allowed to stand and walk a few steps. His whole body was still weak and he was extremely nervous. His feet could scarcely bear the weight of his frame.

He regained his strength quickly, and in two more days was taken to his home.

The doctors realized that in the person of the unfortunate Tonious they had a man who had virtually been through all the experiences of an electrocuted victim—with the very important addition that Tonious had come back to life and full consciousness and was able to supply the answers to the mysteries which have heretofore always been buried with the remains of the electrocuted murderers.

Pressed for information on all the aspects of his remarkable experience, Tonious said:

"Dying was quick and without much pain. Coming back to life was slow and very painful."

"When I started to back out of the elevator," Tonious continued, "I recall stepping on the wire. I could feel it under my foot. Then I felt a terrible jolt on the back of my head. It felt as if some one had struck me there with a club. I remember having cried out, but my voice seemed to trail off in the distance. It felt as if a bomb had been inserted in my skull and as if it had exploded and blown off the top of my head."

"Then it seemed as if a million needles

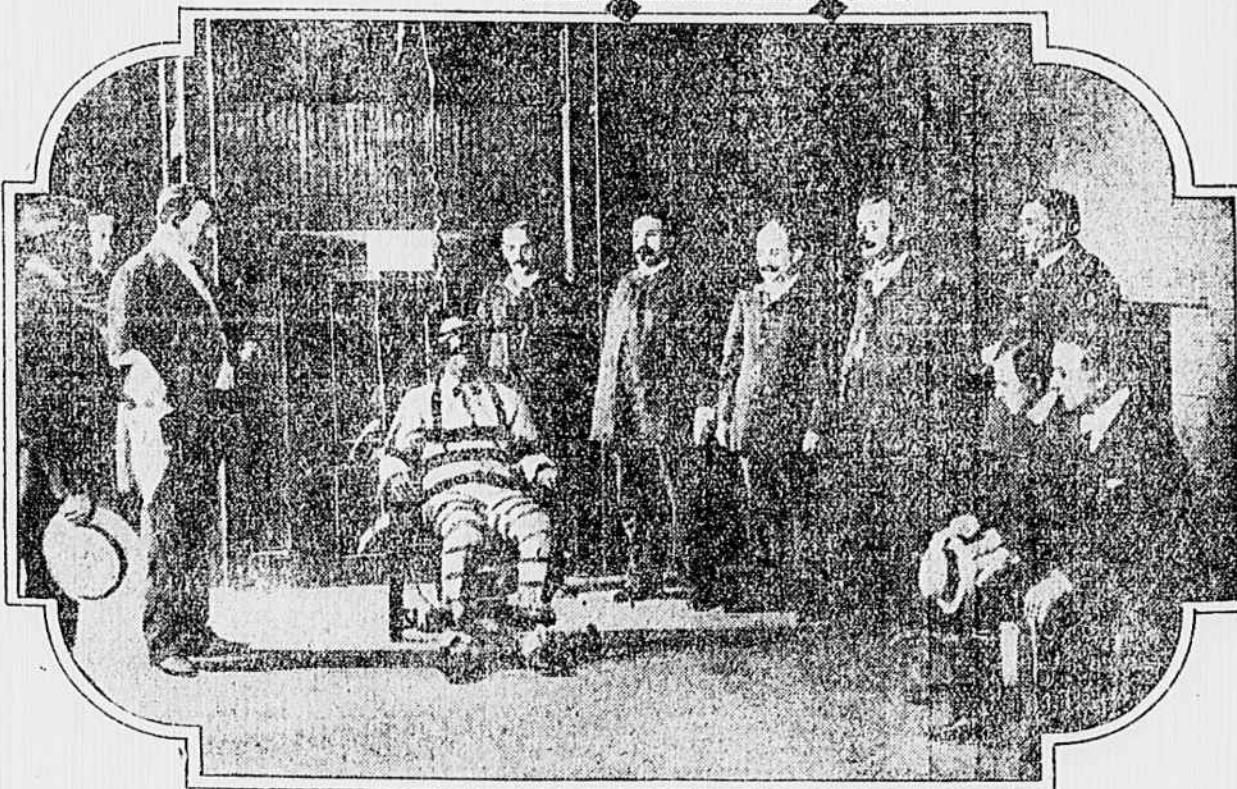
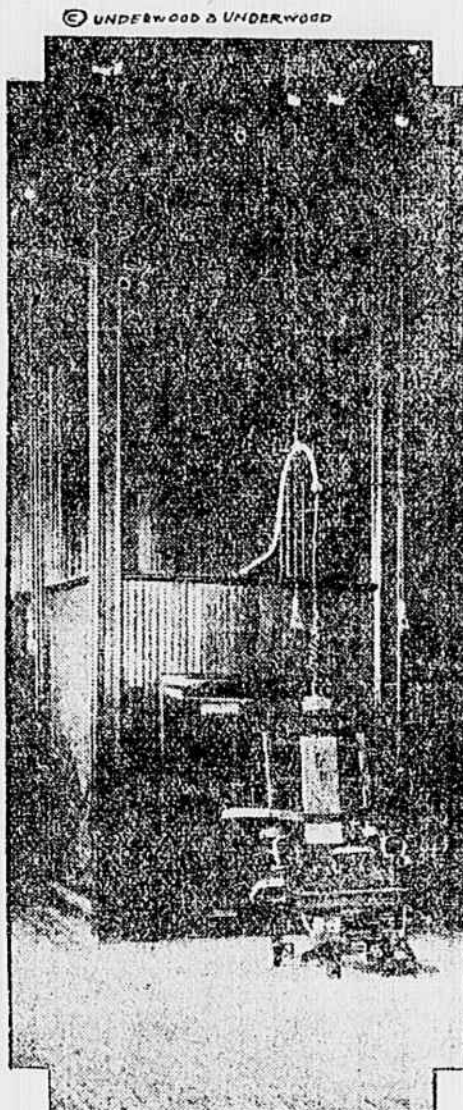
and pins were shooting through my body. They pricked all at the same time. The top of my head seemed to rise. I felt the ground giving way under my feet as if I were on the brink of a precipice the edge of which had crumbled under me. I felt myself falling. There was nothing to support me. I realized that no part of my body was moving of its own accord, but the whole of me kept falling. All this appeared to be in a short space of time, probably no more than a few seconds, and then finally I felt as if I were floating in space. I couldn't see, hear, smell or feel anything, and then suddenly all was a blank. I just couldn't think or remember anything."

"I remember now that when I stepped on the wire I felt no sensation in my leg or foot. It was all in my head. At the time, after realizing I had stepped on a wire, I forgot all about my leg and foot. Only my head was in pain. There was no mark or burn on either my shoe, my sock, or my foot. The pain of the jolt and the explosion in my head and of the needles and pins through my body was intense."

"After my mind had been a blank, I don't know how long, as I had no idea of time or anything else, I began to hear. My first realization was of the sound of rushing water or a heavy wind. It sounded like when you stand on the beach at the lake when the waves are high—a sort of roaring sound. I heard the roaring first and what seemed then like a few minutes later the sound increased and I could hear a kind of whistle like the wind makes. When I first began to hear it seemed as if I had been holding my ears shut, keeping out all the sound, and then gradually releasing the pressure, the sound growing louder and louder."

"While I didn't realize I was coming back to life, I did think that whatever had happened I had been hearing the noise for a long time. It seemed hours. I didn't realize what was going on, my only impression being that I was hearing something."

"As the sounds grew louder, as if bigger waves were dashing on the beach and the force of the wind had increased,



The Condemned Man in the Electric Chair and Groups of Witnesses in the Death Chamber

they started to swish back and forth. That is, it seemed to me as if the sounds moved, if that were possible. They would grow dim and I thought they were going away from me, and then they would come nearer. I didn't consider whether I could see or not, and didn't wonder why I could not use any other sense than hearing. I didn't wonder where I was or what had happened to me. I just kept thinking of those sounds."

"What seemed to me ages later the sounds began to grow louder and louder,

and I thought they were coming closer to me. I thought if I could only drive them away I would like it better. I didn't feel frightened, exactly, but wanted to get rid of that terrible noise. While I didn't realize I couldn't move I had a vague realization I should fight off the sounds, and my mind seemed to do this by wishing the noises would end."

"Then, suddenly I had another sensation besides hearing. While the noises kept coming nearer and nearer I felt pain. Then for the first time after my

leg sensation, only it was a thousand times more painful. I felt I couldn't stand it. I wanted to fight it, just as I had wanted to fight the sounds. The first feeling of pain came on me suddenly. It seemed to extend all through my body and came as a terrible shock. I felt it all at once, just like the smash I got on the back of my head."

"The pain seemed to keep up for years. I couldn't escape it. I couldn't try to escape it. I couldn't even fight it with my mind. Then, as suddenly as the pain

came, I felt hot all over my body. I had no realization of where I was or what had happened to me, but I felt burning up, and my left foot gradually seemed to feel as if it was aflame. This continued for years and years. It seemed to me as if I were being roasted in a furnace. The pain seemed to increase. I felt as if I surely would burst. I lost track of the noise of the water and the wind as the voices became louder. It seemed like a shouting roar, unintelligible, in my ears."

"Then, while the needle pricking and

mind was a blank I realized I had a body. The pain was similar to the needle pricking sensation, only it was a thousand times more painful. I felt I couldn't stand it. I wanted to fight it, just as I had wanted to fight the sounds. The first feeling of pain came on me suddenly. It seemed to extend all through my body and came as a terrible shock. I felt it all at once, just like the smash I got on the back of my head."

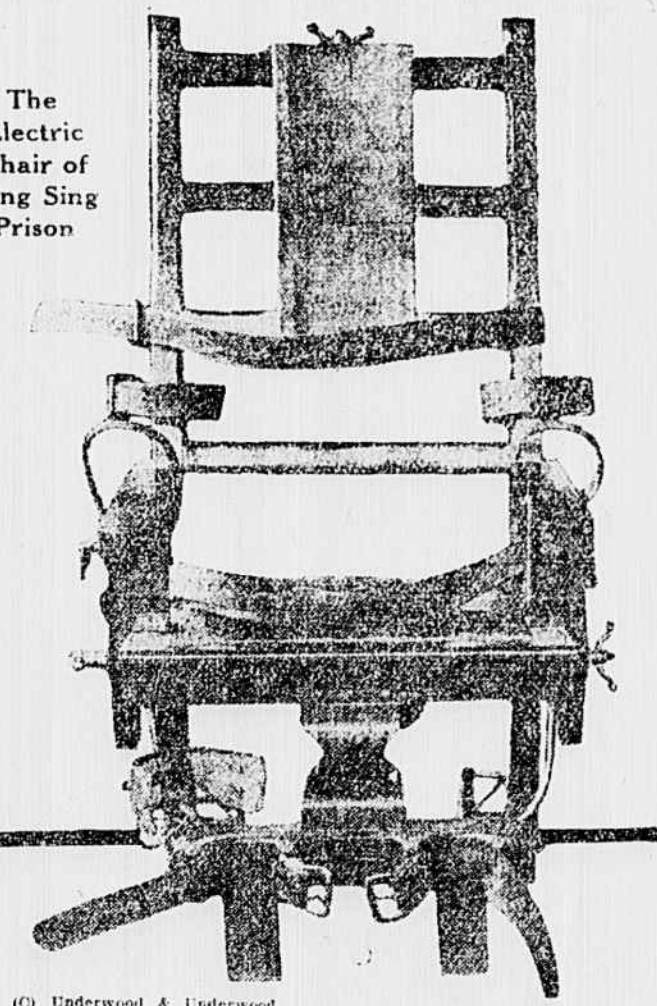
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The Secret Chamber in Which Is Hidden the Electrician, Who Is the Real Executioner

The Electric Chair of Sing Sing Prison



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heat racked my body, I thought I was still at work. It seemed as if I had hurt my foot and had stooped to rub it. Then I felt something pulling at my heart. It was as if some one had put his hand inside my breast and was pulling everything out. Then I lost the feeling that I was at work. When I had it I couldn't see the shop or anything, but just imagined I was at work."

"The next I knew I felt myself sliding, it seemed forward, and being pulled back again. It just seemed as if my whole body, still in terrible pain, was being floated backward and forward."

"All this time the voices never ceased. I could hear them, but I couldn't recognize what they said. Then finally they became louder and louder. The pain seemed to increase. I felt as if I surely would burst. I lost track of the noise of the water and the wind as the voices became louder. It seemed like a shouting roar, unintelligible, in my ears."

## His Remarkable Description of His Feelings.

"Again I thought that I was still at work and that the voices were those of the men around me shouting to me to hurry and finish unloading the elevator. 'Hurry, hurry, hurry,' they seemed to cry. I tried to see, but couldn't."

"Then the next thing I knew, amid all the noise and the pain, something opened one of my eyes and for a second I thought I saw the room in which I had been working. Then all the noise was shut off as suddenly. The calling stopped, but the pain in my body continued. It seemed as if the millions of needles which were pricking me all over had been blown into me at once."

"The tugging of my heart continued. Then I lost the sensation of heat and was cold. Little by little I felt warmth stealing through my body, starting from my feet, until I seemed as if I was roasting in a furnace. Then the calling returned. I still thought I was at work and tried to pick up my truck in compliance with the demand to 'Hurry, hurry,' but the pain all over my body was so great I couldn't bend over. I couldn't see anything, and I didn't know what was the matter with me, although I gradually thought that I had hurt my left foot. The pulses in my head were pounding like a trip-hammer."

"Finally it seemed like years until I opened my eyes and saw strange men standing around me. I was still in terrible pain. I asked them where I was, and they told me that my boss had let me go to sleep. I thought I would take advantage of this, and instantly all the pain and noises left me and I really fell asleep."

"The next time I could see I was lying in a bed. I saw a woman wearing a white cap standing by the bed. Then I slept again."

In the graphic narrative of the experiences of this hospital patient the doctors have found the answers to the questions of mental and bodily sensations of the victim in the electric chair.

## Why Doctors Should Be More Than Wage Earners

THE other day somebody told Dr. Charles W. Burr, a well-known Pennsylvania physician, that he was a wage earner and he was greatly astonished. In the simplicity of his innocence he says he had believed, or subconsciously assumed that physicians did not get wages but begged to accept fees. He thought physicians did things daily that are not paid for and cannot be paid for save in a coin with a far different ring than gold.

How, asks Dr. Burr, does the physician differ psychologically from other wage earners? What is the defect in his mentality compelling him to continue poor but honest, instead of as his advisers would like him to be, rich and wicked, according to the new morality?

In any psychology study the factors compelling and controlling conduct are of first importance. If, then, the influences which lead men to become physicians

are of the kind which would not influence men in general, physicians have a peculiar psychological makeup—are abnormal, or superior. Chance, choice and destiny make men physicians.

Excluding the small percentage of men who go into medicine from purely altruistic motives, there are five classes of men who study medicine: (1) those who do not want to work with their hands, because they imagine it is easier to work with the mind and much more respectable; (2) those who think medicine is a gentlemanly occupation and sometimes enables one to marry a rich wife; (3) the men who believe they can make money by criminal practices without being caught; (4) those who think they can make money, notwithstanding the general opinion to the contrary; and (5) those who have a hunger for things intellectual, are drunk with scientific inquisitiveness and curious to learn the secrets of that strange machine the living animal.

When destiny agrees with choice we have the student

who alone should be encouraged, and of this type there are enough to meet the need of the country for physicians. The time is coming when these physicians by choice and destiny alone will survive, and there will be no need of discussions on the salvation from being poor. There is nothing in the physician as a wage earner differentiating him from the rest of the world. About as many physicians proportionately as business men are making an income of \$10,000 a year, which amateur sociologists tell us means success. The physician is not more careless in business matters than other people.

There is, however, a psychological answer to the wage earner question among physicians, that of permitting to study medicine only those in whom choice and destiny combine. The few schools of the better class have already taken steps in this direction. When low class medical schools cease to exist, the wage question will take care of itself.